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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

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AMMAN FOR BHALLA

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TBIO](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQI GOVERNMENT LOOKS TO U.S., KUWAIT AND ROPME
FOR HELP WITH ENVIRONMENT

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A group of Iraqi officials visited Kuwait in September for a roundtable on Iraqi environmental issues initiated by the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME). This roundtable, part of a series of meetings between ROPME and Iraq, served as an opportunity for Iraqi officials to discuss environmental concerns in Iraq and ask for assistance with equipment and training for the relevant ministries. ROPME and Kuwait, as a member of ROPME, offered assistance with training, assessment and monitoring. The Iraqis, in turn, asked the U.S. military to provide resources to upgrade delapidated Iraqi pipelines and ports, and provide equipment to handle environmental crises. Kuwait voiced its concerns over spill-over effects of the war in Iraq on Kuwaiti water quality. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) ROPME Executive Secretary Abdul Rahman Al-Awadi told Econoff on September 30 that the September 8-11 roundtable was organized as part of a series of meetings to find solutions for regional pollution and environmental degradation resulting from the war in Iraq. Representatives from the Iraqi Oil Ministry, Ministry of Environment, and Ministry of Transportation attended the roundtable. The Acting Director of the Environment Public Authority (EPA) and Director of Marine Pollution Monitoring Department represented the GOK. US military and civilian representatives from NAVCENT, the U.S. Coast Guard, and Combined Task Force 59 (a multinational task force operating in the northern Persian Gulf region) attended as observers. This series of meetings was organized following Iraq's readmission to ROPME in 2005 after almost 15 years of exclusion. EconOff met separately with ROPME Executive Secretary on September 30 and EPA Acting Director on

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September 24 for readouts of the Iraqi roundtable.

¶3. (SBU) Al-Awadi clarified that the roundtable focused on basic strategies for tackling Iraq's environmental problems. Iraqis are not yet ready for technical discussions or concrete plans to address specific areas of concern, he said. A significant amount of foundation-building is needed before specific concerns can be addressed. Iraqi officials mentioned that a budget of \$100 million will be needed for equipment and training to handle disasters. As a starting point, three major objectives were discussed:

-- Make environmental concerns a governmental priority in Iraq. Al-Awadi lamented that due to the current situation in Iraq, pollution and environmental disasters are low on the list of priorities for the Iraqi government. EPA Director

Ali Haider said that the Iraqis are so overwhelmed with security concerns that there is no time to focus on environmental issues. Moreover, he said, the Iraqi Minister of Environment is not taken seriously and very little is being done to address the critical environmental problems faced by Iraq. It is crucial, he said, that the Iraqi government and the U.S. military spend time and resources on addressing some of these issues.

-- Procure equipment needed to manage ports and oil pipelines. Iraqis need to upgrade the equipment at ports used for loading oil on to ships. Oil leakage and spillage at the ports due to deterioration of loading equipment is a critical problem that needs immediate attention. Significant improvements also need to be made to the pipelines to avoid spillage into the marine environment. There are also a lot of substandard ships coming into Iraqi ports. The Iraqi government needs to place tighter controls on the quality of ships entering its ports. ROPME asked the U.S. military to provide equipment and resources for training and equipping the Iraqis.

-- Hire, train and equip personnel to effectively respond to environmental crises. Ali Haider claimed that there are very few environmental experts working in the relevant ministries in Iraq. As a result, there are almost no technical or policy experts to take the lead in these ministries. More importantly, they do not have any training to deal with a crisis. ROPME has offered assistance to the Iraqis to train personnel in all relevant agencies dealing with marine pollution. GOK, as a member of ROPME, has offered training to the Iraqis, specifically for government officials in the Ministries of Oil, Transportation and Environment. According to EPA officials, Kuwaiti EPA offered the Iraqis "any help they need with training, assessment or monitoring."

4, (SBU) Ali Haider said that "the Amir himself has given

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the relevant ministries the green light to offer training and support to the Iraqis" to deal with the environment. He admitted that this is mainly because Kuwait is worried about the spill-over effects of Iraqi marine pollution.

Kuwaiti Concerns regarding Iraq

15. (SBU) Major areas of concern for Kuwait are pollution levels in the Shatt Al-Arab, sunken vessels and other pollutants in Iraqi waters, and condition of Iraqi pipelines. Historically, the Shatt has served as the only source of fresh water to Kuwait. However, in recent years, it has suffered devastating contamination from Iranian and Iraqi shipping. This is exacerbated by increased pollution due to the war in Iraq. EPA officials worry that the Shatt al-Arab has deteriorated from being a source of fresh water to a source of pollution to the Kuwaiti marine environment.

16. (SBU) Sunken vessels in Iraqi waters are "an environmental nightmare," Haider contended. There are several vessels filled with gasoline, diesel, batteries and other pollutants buried in Iraqi port waters. This has made navigation through Iraqi waters extremely hazardous. A massive regional effort has to be undertaken to clean up the port waters. Kuwait urged the Iraqi government to make removal of obstructions to navigation a priority. Kuwait is also concerned about the condition of Iraqi oil pipelines. Ali Haider argued that Iraqi pipelines and equipment are so old and delapidated that they are disasters waiting to happen.

17. (SBU) Haider complained that although Kuwait is eager to support Iraq, it is hard for the GOK to move from discussion to action. The biggest problem, he suggested, in Kuwaiti cooperation with Iraqis on this or any other issue is the lack of continuity in Iraqi ministries. He said that the Kuwaiti EPA has talked to various Iraqi officials in the past

but they were unable to follow through on any plans because of frequent turnover in Iraqi ministries.

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